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SUBJECT: GEORGIA: DIP CORPS TOURS TBILISI PRISON

¶1. (U) Summary and comment: Minister of Corrections and Legal Assistance (MCLA) Dimitry Shashkin invited the diplomatic corps to visit Tbilisi's Gldani prison in order to assess the state of Georgia's prison system. The Ambassador, along with multiple ambassadors, diplomats, and NGO representatives attended the March 23 event. Shashkin offered to open any door upon request, and answered any and all questions. With the tour, Shashkin took a first step toward one of his key goals in implementing GOG democratic reforms. The tour was a transparent look into an area of frequent criticism by many Western governments. The prison appeared well maintained and professionally run. Post has encouraged the government to continue prison reforms. End summary and comment.

¶2. (U) Gldani prison was completed in late 2007, and began operations in the spring of 2008. It has a maximum capacity of 4,000 inmates. It currently houses around 3,000. The prison holds both convicted felons as well as suspects being held on pre-trial detention in two large, separate cellblocks. It is a maximum-security facility, and meets the most stringent standards in Georgia's penal system. Three hundred total prison guards work at the prison, with around 100 working each shift. Soldiers (non-MCLA) provide external security to the prison. Shashkin said that at least seven prisons in Georgia currently need to be replaced. He said five prisons are in good shape. Currently, two more prisons are under construction, and two are in the design phase.

PRISON CONDITIONS

¶3. (SBU) The group first visited the camera room, which provides coverage of all public places in the prison, but not inside individual cells. Meeting rooms (i.e. for lawyer-client conferences) are also covered by the cameras. The diplomatic group also examined solitary confinement cells. They consist of a small room with a bunk, in-floor toilet and sink. Solitary inmates can leave their cells and walk in a secure area one hour per day. In the remaining cellblocks, there are six inmates per cell. All cells are secured with individual padlocks. Inmates can smoke inside their cells, but not in public or recreation areas.

¶4. (U) The kitchen is run by a Tbilisi-based restaurant group, which won a public tender to provide the service. Meals are taken to inmates in their cells, as no public cafeteria exists. One of the diplomats tried the lunch that was being prepared and said the food was good. The prisoners receive three meals per day. The food must meet the same standard as for Ministry of Defense troops. The GOG spends 90 GEL per month (USD 54) per inmate on food. Shashkin compared this to state pensions, which are currently 110 GEL (USD 66) per month per pensioner.

¶5. (U) Inmates are provided showers once per week. The shower rooms are divided into six individual stalls and a common changing room. An enclosed recreation area is located on the top of the cellblocks. Inmates can use the areas for a minimum of one hour per day; often more. A small commissary exists, where inmates may buy additional snacks, food, or drinks, to supplement the prison's regimen. No cash is transacted, as inmates use electronic purchase cards to

which family members can add money. Some inmates work in the prison laundry facilities. They reside in a smaller, separate cellblock. Prisoners from throughout the system may volunteer for such duty.

¶ 6. (U) The prison hospital can hold up to 250 patients. All prisoners are screened for TB upon their arrival to the prison, and then upon request. The hospital has modern diagnostic rooms and often upon request. The hospital has modern diagnostic rooms and trained medical staff. Prisoners were undergoing treatment during the visit. The prison has a separate hall for drug addicted inmates, where currently 47 inmates are residing and receiving treatment for addiction to heroin, subotex, and other drugs. Treatment consists of diminishing doses of methadone as well as counseling and medical care.

¶ 7. (U) The prison also provides chaplains to meet with the inmates. Differing faiths, in addition to the Georgian Orthodox Church, are accommodated, including imams for Muslims. Other considerations are provided as possible, including for religious diets or beliefs.

TEFFT